



LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

Report title

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## CoVID-19 Lessons Learnt – Second Wave

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Report to	Date
Commissioner's Board	25 August 2021
Deputy Mayor's Fire and Resilience Board	7 September 2021
<u>London Fire Commissioner</u>	

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Report by	Report number
Assistant Commissioner, Transformation Directorate	LFC-0579y

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I agree the recommended decision below.

**Andy Roe**  
London Fire Commissioner

This decision was remotely  
signed on 21/09/2021

Date

### Executive Summary

This report provides an account of the lessons learnt throughout the organisation from the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, citing the peak period of 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021. It provides information on the actions taken by the Brigade to carry out its usual daily activities and provide services as normally as possible. The report also highlights new and continued ways of working throughout the pandemic that the organisation may wish to learn from to inform future ways of working and responding to long-term major incidents.

### Recommended Decisions

For the London Fire Commissioner:

1. That this report is approved as the lessons learnt by the Brigade from the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, covering the period from 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021, at which stage the second wave was considered to have peaked;
2. That this report is made available to HMICFRS; and

3. That this report is made available on the Brigade website to all staff and other interested parties (including external partners) to help promote understanding of the Brigade's journey through the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Introduction and Background**

1. This report provides an overview and reflection on the lessons learnt by the organisation from the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (from 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021).
2. The report has been structured around collating learning points into seven key themes:
  - Planning & Policy
  - Remote Working & Virtualisation
  - Communication & Engagement
  - Estates & Premises
  - Service Delivery & Partner Support
  - Frontline Operational Response
  - Welfare & Culture
3. Each section acknowledges the key considerations and questions raised in the earlier First Wave Lessons Learnt Report (December 2020), then raises items from the second wave as;
  - Successes
  - Challenges
  - Issues
  - Learning
4. This information will allow us to assess how our response to the pandemic has developed since the initial wave, learn further lessons from the extended nature of the situation and inform planning and delivery of our ongoing response and recovery activity.
5. As with the lessons determined by the first wave report, capturing this information will also help the organisation deliver its remaining Transformation Delivery Plan actions effectively.
6. The main report is attached at Appendix 1 - COVID-19 Lessons Learnt – Second Wave.

### **Alternative Options Considered and Consultation**

7. The content of this report was collated from input given by each department across the Brigade. Departments were engaged through the CoVCG Working Group representatives and all departments were encouraged to send feedback on their own experiences of the second wave period. Heads of Service received an early copy of this report to review and confirm that their successes, challenges, issues, and learnings have been fairly and accurately reflected – the report was presented in the Commissioners & Heads of Service Meeting on 4 August 2021.

### **Objectives and Expected Outcomes**

8. The objective of this report is to capture a clear picture and narrative of the Brigade's continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic beyond the first wave. By capturing our transition from the first to the second wave, understanding how we managed our service deliverables throughout

this time and identifying how we further adapted and embedded new ways of working we will continue to improve our preparedness for further waves of the pandemic.

9. The report highlights the impacts of continued restrictions of non-essential activities, the continued deployment of a largely remote FRS workforce and the challenges of managing high-volume sickness and self-isolation of staff. The expected outcomes should therefore include reinforcing our resilience, informing robust response policy development, and providing context and guidance in the case of any comparable future incidents.

### **Equality Impact**

10. The London Fire Commissioner and decision takers are required to have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (s149 of the Equality Act 2010) when taking decisions. This in broad terms involves understanding the potential impact of policy and decisions on different people, taking this into account and then evidencing how decisions were reached.
11. It is important to note that consideration of the Public Sector Equality Duty is not a one-off task. The duty must be fulfilled before taking a decision, at the time of taking a decision, and after the decision has been taken.
12. The protected characteristics are: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Pregnancy and maternity, Marriage, and civil partnership (but only in respect of the requirements to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination), Race (ethnic or national origins, colour, or nationality), Religion or belief (including lack of belief), Sex, Sexual orientation.
13. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us, in the exercise of all our functions (i.e., everything we do), to have due regard to the need to:
  - (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibited conduct.
  - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
14. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard to the need to:
  - (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic where those disadvantages are connected to that characteristic.
  - (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
  - (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

15. The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.
16. Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—
  - (a) tackle prejudice, and
  - (b) promote understanding.
17. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been undertaken specifically for this report. An EIA was not required because equalities considerations have been undertaken as part of our response to CoVID-19.

### **Procurement and Sustainability**

18. There are no procurement or sustainability impacts arising from this report.

### **Strategic Drivers**

19. This report provides information that can be used to help delivery of the Transformation Delivery Plan and future Brigade plans.

### **Workforce Impact**

20. This report also contains information about the workforce, in particular their response to meeting the pandemic head-on, and contains several learning points about welfare and culture to be taken into consideration – including the increasing health inequalities COVID-19 presents across London.

### **Finance Comments**

21. This report provides an account of the lessons learnt to date throughout the organisation from the second wave of the CoVID-19 pandemic.
22. The total cost of LFC's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was £12,521k for 2020/21 and is offset by funding from the GLA of £1,760k and £160k for the London Resilience Group, additional income for cost recovery from the LAS of £6,835k on operational overtime, allowances and travel for ADA support, £252k in a grant from the Home Office following the Brigades claim against the first round of COVID grants and a further grant from the Home Office to meet the remaining £3,514k in cost.
23. The Home Office final grant award also provided an additional £1,968k in funding for any further Covid-19 response costs in 2021/22, which has been placed into a new earmarked reserve.

### **Legal Comments**

24. This report together with Appendix 1 sets out the Brigades response to and learning from COVID-19.
25. The London Fire Commissioner has the functions of the fire and rescue authority for Greater London under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 ('the Act'), with the core duties being set out in sections 6-9 such as firefighting, dealing with road accidents, fire safety and other

emergencies. Section 5 of the same Act enables the Commissioner to do anything he considers appropriate for the purposes incidental or indirectly incidental for the purposes of carrying out any of the fire and rescue services functions.

26. Under s327A of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 the London Fire Commissioner must secure that the London Fire and Rescue Service is efficient and effective. Analysing the Brigades response to COVID19, learning lessons on how to maintain and provide a continuous service, and asking probing questions of how the service can improve whilst the pandemic continues will ensure the Brigade remains efficient and effective in terms of service delivery.

List of Appendices

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Protective Marking</b>
1.	COVID-19 Lessons Learnt – Second Wave	None

COVID-19  
LESSONS  
LEARNT  
REPORT

SECOND WAVE

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## COVID-19 Activity & Response Timeline

2020	
Government Milestones	Key LFB Activity/Milestones
<b>FEBUARY – BC ACTIVATION</b>	
COVID pandemic risk level increased	SRA (Strategic Response Arrangements)
	Pandemic Influenza Plan
	Review of Business Continuity Plans
<b>MARCH – INITIAL RESPONSE</b>	
COVID Pandemic & National Emergency stated	Set up of core CCG structures and BCC function to manage response internally (and Pan London/Nationally)
COVID secure guidelines & National Lockdown introduced	Restrictions on all non-essential or non-risk critical activity
	Staff advised to work from home if they can
<b>APRIL/MAY – ONGOING RESPONSE</b>	
Lockdown Continued	Continued delivery and development of core structures and BCC function to meet uncertainty and changing Government advice - including guidelines on the use of PPE
	LFB ADA Scheme activated to support LAS & PMART with commitment to detach 400 Firefighters
<b>JUNE – RECOVERY PLANNING</b>	
	Estate Risk Assessment (alongside continued development of Wider LFB Estate Transformation plan)
	Review of activities impacted, and recovery recommendations considered
<b>JULY/AUGUST – RECOVERY PLANNING</b>	
	Individual Staff Risk Assessment
	Ongoing review of impacted activities
<b>SEPTEMBER – EXTENDED RESPONSE &amp; HOME-WORKING PLANS ESTABLISHED</b>	
	HMI Inspection
	Information gathering to inform Lessons Learnt report and recommendations



	Refinement of working practices and planning for longer-term home working for vast majority of staff.
<b>OCTOBER/NOVEMBER– SECOND WAVE RESPONSE</b>	
Second National Lock-down announced - 5 November to 3 December	CoVCG Working Group continued to meet to provide Second Wave response activity and planning provision, with CCG leadership
	Initial Lessons Learnt reporting drafted and key lessons used to inform Second Wave planning and decision making
	LFB Cadets set up half-term Food Bank scheme to support vulnerable local families in Tottenham & Lee Green during the pandemic
<b>DECEMBER 2020 – SECOND NATIONAL LOCKDOWN CONTINUED</b>	
	Engaged with future NHS testing programme opportunities for staff
<b>2021</b>	
<b>JANUARY/FEBRUARY - CONTINUED LOCKDOWN &amp; SECOND WAVE RESPONSE</b>	
Government Roadmap announced 22 February	LFB response to Covid-19 was recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)
	Staff vaccination impacts considered
<b>FEBRUARY - ROADMAP STEP 1</b>	
Government Roadmap out of lockdown announced 22 February - with earliest 8 March activation	CCG responded to the introduction of the Governments Roadmap, triggering new planning & policy milestones for the CoVCG Working Group and partners
	De-escalation plans continued to be developed to meet the expected Roadmap triggers
	Wider LFB Estate Transformation plan (rotas, hybrid-working, hubs) reviewed to reflect Roadmap triggers
	LFB commit Mobile Shelters to support roll-out of vaccinations in densely populated areas of London where residents have limited access to transport routes
<b>MARCH - ROADMAP STEP 1</b>	
Roadmap Step 1 triggered 8 March	Impacts review of 1 year of COVID - including Leave, CFS, (HSFV activity), Inspections, Training etc
	Low-level exercising returned 29 March (4 Pump max)

	Lewisham crews deliver over 400 food parcels to support vulnerable residents suffering during the pandemic
<b>APRIL - ROADMAP STEP 2</b>	
Roadmap Step 2 triggered 12 April	NHS LFT Kits delivered to LFB - distributed initially to all Stations and regular testing recommendation communicated to staff
Vaccination Programme Phase 1 Introduced	High-risk on-site HSFV return to support continued phone and online activity
	Volunteer Cadet Instructor (VCI) recommenced with limited cohorts w/c 12 April
	Face to face Cadet delivery activity commenced with COVID-safe RA carried out to reopen 15 Area Hubs w/c 19 April
<b>MAY - ROADMAP STEP 3</b>	
Roadmap Step 3 triggered 17 MAY	Continued review of de-escalation plans to reflect expected Third Wave impacts
Third Wave expected due to surge of cases and high-transmission variants appearing in the UK	Second Wave Lessons Learnt informing Third Wave BC planning
<b>JUNE - ROADMAP STEP 4 POSTPONED</b>	
Road Map Step 4 Due 21 June - postponed until earliest 19 July	CCG approve BCC extension to earliest 30 July
	Continued review of de-escalation plans to reflect expected Third Wave & Delta variant impacts
	CCG share Local Authority request for vaccination engagement support with Stations following earlier support of 8 pop-up vaccination events in which doctors administered over 600 vaccines
	LFB committed to continue supporting LAS through the ADA scheme - with 500 Firefighters having attended over 140,000 incidents since April 2020
	LFB hit support milestones of distributing over 20 million items of PPE and making over 40,000 face shields for hospital staff across London
<b>JULY - EXPECTED ROADMAP STEP 4 TRIGGERED</b>	

## COVID-19 Lessons Learnt Context

1. The activities undertaken by London Fire Brigade during the period of the First Wave were reviewed for initial lessons learnt and themed as follows in the report prepared by Business Continuity Team in December 2020:
  - Planning & Policy
  - Remote Working & Virtualisation
  - Communication & Engagement
  - Estates & Premises
  - Service Delivery & Partner Support
  - Frontline Operational Response
  - Welfare & Culture
2. This Second Wave Lessons Learnt Report will use the same themes to ensure clear continuity and offer the ability to compare findings from each period.

## COVID-19 Second Wave Lessons Learnt Introduction

3. In order to inform effective planning for any further outbreaks, and to assess how the lessons learnt from the first wave of the pandemic were utilised to improve the response to the second wave, a Second Wave Lessons Learnt Report has been produced.
4. This report covers the period from 1 December 2020 to March 31 2021 (*while the pandemic was still in an active response phase after 31 March 2021, this represents the bulk of the period during which cases related to the second wave were most prominent.*)
5. In addition to the themes used in this report, the Brigade would also benefit from reviewing long term workforce plans, including supporting Covid policies, continuity plans and blended ways of working as it delivers on its transformation priorities.

# Planning & Policy

## 6. **Position prior to COVID-19 (Recap)**

*The Brigade had a framework of policies and plans in place allowing us to respond to major incidents or business disruptions. Core plans included;*

- *Strategic Response Arrangements - The Brigade's Strategic Response Arrangements (PN 699) provide a flexible framework for managing and coordinating the Brigade's response to major incidents (spontaneous and protracted) and business disruptions.*
- *Influenza Pandemic Policy (PN655)*
- *Corporate and Departmental Business Continuity Plans*
- *Contingency specific plans such as degradation plans.*

## 7. **First Wave Lessons Learnt Key Considerations (Recap)**

*What early warnings and triggers do we need to take account of, to stand up arrangements for future rises in infection rate? How will we get this intelligence?*

*How can the Brigade move away from its traditional 'command and control' nature into a space where it is more flexible and can adapt strategic policy to meet the needs of a dynamic situation? What are the advantages and disadvantages in having either a more generic or more specific continuity plan?*

*How do we move the focus from concentrating on response to improving our long-term planning outlook? What steps can we take to help with decision making?*

## **Second Wave - Successes**

8. Data-Driven Planning & Response: Continued analysis of our own Brigade data (Self Isolation, Test Results etc) and use of Government horizon-scanning tools (Road Map, Surge Testing Areas, Area Case Rates etc), has allowed us to manage our response to the second wave from an informed position – increasing confidence and transparency around decision making.
9. Continued Operational influence: The continued engagement of the Brigade, the Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) and management of established links to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) proved useful in ensuring alignment with the national position as well as the London position.
10. Management and ongoing adaptation of absence/leave policies to meet changing Government guidelines: Due to increased testing capabilities compared with the First Wave, policies have had to adapt to reflect actions and impacts of test results. Along with the effects of Long-COVID adding to the initial wave of self-isolation and absence, management of cases and flexible approaches to newly identified absence scenarios continue to be introduced.

11. Dynamic BCC Handbook: Production of the Brigade Coordination Centre (BCC) handbook, and crucially the continual improvement and version control throughout the second wave, provided guidance across the organisation, ensuring that Government guidelines were understood and relevant changes to business as usual (BAU) communicated across the Brigade. Regular changes from Government and partner agencies made this particularly difficult but especially important in managing the continued uncertainty of Covid.
12. Business Intelligence (BI) Dashboard: Introduction and continued development of LFB's BI 'Daily Calls & Incidents' dashboard made data-gathering more accessible and informed reports with accurate timely data.
13. Degradation strategy: The continued use of the degradation strategy was able to provide confidence about the levels of resilience and available capacity to assist partners. Early decisions taken by Commissioner's Continuity Group (CCG) to focus on core activities freed up resources to support partners as required.

## **Second Wave – Challenges**

14. Continual Uncertainty – Policy Review: Review requirements for old policies and procedures identified in the first wave were made more complicated by the extended nature of the pandemic, and continually changing assumptions and messaging around further activity, case rates and Covid-safe guidelines.
15. Continual Uncertainty – Reporting & Governance: Preparing for recovery processes only to stand up response processes again led to some duplicate or conflicting reporting and governance processes.
16. Accountability & Ownership: As the extended timeline of the pandemic is unknown, language around response and recovery has not always been helpful. For example, tendency to refer to 'working groups' in meetings without specifying which group, or whether this is a 'formal working group' (with terms of reference etc) rather than a group working collaboratively on a piece of work has led to confusion over accountability and ownership of plans.
17. Additional/alternative policy requirements: The identification of additional policies, or amendments to extant policies continued throughout the second wave and appears to be ongoing. The increasingly complex needs in terms of work flexibility, COVID impacts, response to Government guidelines etc increases the resource-requirements needed to ensure that all policies are compliant and inclusive throughout the Brigade.
18. COVID Working Group: The group worked well from the start to identify not only issues, but also identify and progress solutions. However, conflicting commitments resulted in some departments being unrepresented at times.
19. On-boarding of new staff: Knowledge sharing in a remote working environment and with some access and information restrictions creates challenges to understanding the 'LFB context'.

## Second Wave – Issues

20. Information Access: There is no single repository for the information and data held across the business areas responding to the pandemic, meaning excessive use of email for document sharing and additional resource requirements when documents need to be sourced or identified.
21. Widening COVID Inequalities emerged: There was a greater awareness of health inequalities and the practical actions needed to minimise the impact of Covid on Londoners from ethnic minorities and those living in deprived or highly populated areas.
22. 'Pilot scheme' demands: A significant number of national and local pilots, programmes or schemes related to testing, future vaccination, track & trace, and other pandemic-related subjects have been introduced to the Brigade by departments or partner agencies at very early exploratory stages. This has created extra demands on resources and created barriers to moving forward with known and established activity streams.

## Second Wave – Learning

23. Increased multi-scenario policy reviewing: Generic incident response arrangements need to consider alternative arrangements for different timelines and scenarios for long-term events such as a future pandemic or further COVID waves.
24. Internal Reporting: Future data requests should consider what information is needed for assurance, and what is needed for decision making in response or to pre-empt issues. The rationale needs to be given at the point of request, particularly for ad-hoc reporting.
25. External Reporting: Although LFB has less control over requests from partner agencies (NFCC/SCG etc), it would be beneficial for requests to be collated where possible, for the use of data requested to be clarified (both to ensure accurate reporting and to 'close the loop' on its use) and for reports produced using requested data to be shared to provide context.
26. COVID Working Group: As activity continues, working group meetings should become more targeted, with either set aims depending on delivery requirements, or with smaller group requests to tackle specific response areas or challenges.
27. Pilots & Programmes: COVID-related pilot schemes should be introduced at the point of enrolment and a decision made on whether LFB will join and who will own the delivery within an agreed timeframe. Enrolment to testing programmes that require resources across the organisation should be agreed by all relevant departments to ensure that it is in the best interests of LFB, compared with alternative options. Capacity and ownership should be agreed before any commitment to join is made.
28. Information & Document Access: Review the ability to create a shared platform for use across LFB. SharePoint folder use should be considered to create a single source of information and shared documentation for Covid. This needs to be accessible to all.
29. Inequality & Inclusion: LFB must continue to consider health and lifestyle inequalities in all developments of the Emergency Response strategy (and objectives) for a further wave if required.

## Remote Working & Virtualisation

### 30. **Position prior to COVID-19 (Recap)**

*Our day to day working arrangements prior to the pandemic have largely consisted of most staff reporting to a Brigade premises to carry out their work. While there are some specialist staff such as inspecting officers using remote specialist devices, most staff were utilising workstations at a Brigade site.*

*However, there was some capacity for remote access pre-COVID, with typically up to 80-100 staff working remotely per day.*

### 31. **First Wave Lessons Learnt Key Considerations (Recap)**

*Seizing the future: Given that staff have proven they can innovate and adapt to the challenges CoVID-19 has presented, how do we create a virtual working environment that promotes innovation and new ways of working to ensure that we continually improve?*

*What longer term investment in staff is required by the Brigade to support safe DSE compliant personal ICT set ups at home?*

## Second Wave - Successes

32. Enhanced knowledge-sharing: There was more knowledge of how best to share data and documents in the second wave compared to the first, enabling a better situational awareness and response despite not being able to discuss active workstreams face-to-face.
33. Increased confidence in virtual platforms: Due to increased time spent using Brigade platforms and online tools, staff naturally became more confident in their use and continued to identify benefits such as shared Microsoft Forms or Teams Chat areas for group discussion.
34. Virtual socialising: Whether within teams, representative groups or at Lunch & Learn type events and sessions, there was an increase in confidence with many staff members meeting in social environments. Despite a very challenging period, this meant that some festive events and engagements were able to continue in a new way, ensuring interaction and morale outside of the office environment was increased.
35. Continued & Improved Engagement with Communities: Confidence in virtual engagement activity with Cadets, online volunteer recruitment and firefighter information days, and telephone calls to vulnerable people who had previously received Fire Safety & Well visits increased, referring onwards when needed. Virtual fire safety sessions with schools and home schoolers created by the Education Team continued to be an invaluable asset the Brigade's service continuity.

36. Training and Professional Development Planning: Despite challenges around delivery throughout this time, continual innovation and planning meant that in-person training was able to start being phased back in at the earliest opportunity within Government Guidelines.

## **Second Wave – Challenges**

37. Identifying priority needs for continued equipment upgrading or distribution: As with many areas, the extended timeline of the pandemic and the necessity for most staff to continue working from home meant that what may have been appropriate initial or temporary set-ups began not to fulfil all needs, both in terms of actual equipment and programme access needs, but also to ensure compliance with health and safety policies in the case of safe working practices.
38. Extended uncertainty around the future of remote or on-site working: As with Property, there is a huge spectrum of expectations across staff groups. With some staff members being keen to return to the office for various reasons (isolation, cramped work conditions at home etc), and others feeling wary of commuting any time soon there has been significant pressure on Property to provide answers on next steps.
39. On-boarding of new staff: Knowledge sharing in a remote working environment and with some access and information restrictions creates challenges to understanding the 'LFB context'.

## **Second Wave - Issues**

40. Connection quality: Variable experiences in individuals' access to strong online connectivity – partly due to devices and own internet servers but also due to limitations of local areas, caused significant delays to communication, frustrations at lost time and an increased need to continually readjust collaboration processes to meet business needs.
41. COVID Pressures & Inequalities – Working Environment: Pressures of long-term environmental challenges and inequalities – such as working with children at home due to further lockdowns, having limited/shared space to work or the need to care for family members while working meant that parity of working environments continued to divide.

## **Second Wave – Learning**

42. Pandemic scenario planning: Long-term working plans and delivery goals need to include enhanced scenario consideration (e.g., an end-to-end 'pandemic' or a 'wave-by-wave-pandemic').
43. Accessible opportunity enhancement: Opportunities for staff (enhanced development opportunities, promotion opportunities) need to be offered in a way which reflects the ongoing changes to site access and working environments.
44. Continued reduction of prescriptive working practices: The Brigade should continue to use this opportunity to further review the use of prescriptive policies and encourage staff to take more responsibility and accountability for themselves and each other – particularly since there is consistent evidence that workstreams are being delivered despite unprecedented circumstances and challenges to working lives being faced by all.
45. Responsible messaging: Use of sensitive language is key when planning: 'returning to work' implies that staff have not been working throughout the pandemic, also 'recovery' 'new normal' etc imply a BAU approach (pre-Covid) which is unlikely to occur at any time soon.



46. Training & Development 'Backlog': The impacts on training courses have been significant due to the cancellation of Strategic Resource (SR). To ensure the Brigade continues to meet its obligations under Health and Safety legislation, a strategic approach to 'recovery' is needed to address the backlog. Urgent training needs should be identified, and alternative provisions explored for courses which cannot be entirely fulfilled in the normal ways under Covid-safe guidelines (e.g., identifying online opportunities).

## Communication & Engagement

### 47. **Position prior to COVID-19 (Recap)**

*The Brigade naturally has a variety of ways to communicate and engage audiences internally and externally. We have a dedicated Communications department which makes wide use of digital communications including the internet and intranet, e-mail messages, social media platforms, video production and communication forums to disseminate information.*

### 48. **First Wave Lessons Learnt Key Considerations (Recap)**

*Was the level and amount of communication activity to the workforce appropriate?*

*What resources can be utilised to help with the inevitable high demand on Communications at times of crisis?*

*Could the governance around official communications messages be reviewed to speed up the process? Do all messages require the same level of governance?*

*How do we bridge the 'virtual gap' in the absence of face-to-face conversations so that staff still feel connected to the organisation?*

### **Second Wave - Successes**

49. Continued partnership knowledge sharing: Having direct liaison routes to the SCG/London Resilience Forum (LRF)/NFCC meant that communications could be benchmarked against the local or national message – even in an ever-changing environment.

50. Watch Briefings: The continued introduction of Watch Briefings via Communications and the Brigade Coordination Centre (BCC) provided excellent opportunities for joint organisational messaging and blanket distribution of key information and policy/guideline updates.

51. Direct CoVCG Working Group input: Having representation directly in the working group meant that decisions or actions agreed in the meetings could immediately be considered in terms of messaging needs and priorities.

### **Second Wave – Challenges**

52. Pressures on staff: Continued use of virtual communication tools makes engagement less inclusive, placing far more responsibility on individuals to actively join in and take part.

53. Meeting demand for more information: Information flow from central government was at times stilted with LFB partners often relying on open-source information channels to find out the latest news.

54. Instruction parity: As additional Government guidance during the Second Wave required individual 'opt-in' responsibility (for example, staff following local guidance based on their postcode or workplace type), communications were at times confusing as staff needed to follow their own local guidance rather than request answers from LFB. For some strands of guidance, such as vaccination availability/eligibility, there has been conflicting advice at times.

## **Second Wave - Issues**

55. Political oversight: An increased amount of political oversight of the detail of some work has added to the amount of governance that work (particularly staff comms and reporting) needs to go through before being completed or driven forward.
56. Government guidance: Clarity on central government position or information continued to be often lacking or delayed, particularly when switching between recovery and then response processes.
57. Over-reliance on outdated tools: With the lack of face-to-face contact and familiar ways of working, the use of emails to communicate has increased exponentially. As a result, the utilisation of existing software packages such as SharePoint appears to have decreased significantly. The Brigade may not be as mature as other organisations in terms of exploiting alternative methods of collaborative working.

## **Second Wave – Learning**

58. Communication channel reviewing: Managers must ensure that communication and engagement channels are fit for purpose to maximise the impact of connecting events such as All-Staff Updates. Equipment should be tested to ensure content is effectively received, or in the event of poor internet connections etc, updates could be pre-recorded or provided from an alternative site.
59. Continued consideration for all user groups: All relevant communications need to be appropriate for longer term remote working as well as those on Stations or delivering a BAU role on an LFB site.
60. Video and teleconferencing good practice to be reinforced: LFB staff to communicate video and teleconferencing guidelines/best-practise to all new staff, particularly in the case that a team member may be joining the Brigade from an organisation using alternative platforms and processes. Any preferred behaviours, such as raising a hand via Teams' before asking a question should be communicated to all attendees, whether internal or external, if required.

## Estates & Premises

### 61. **Position prior to COVID-19 (Recap)**

*Most of the operational work force work set shift patterns from a fire station. To ensure the correct number of personnel and skills to keep appliances "on the run" there are approximately 150 standby moves per day.*

*Most of the non-operational workforce are based at Union Street headquarters or one of the area hubs. Whilst some staff work compressed hours or occasionally work from home most are on full time contracts with minimal flexible working.*

*Specialist teams such as Control and Fire Safety Inspection Officers have locations and systems.*

### 62. **First Wave Lessons Learnt Key Considerations (Recap)**

*What changes are required in departmental business continuity plans to enable an immediate and / or a prolonged absence from the Brigade's estate?*

*How can we leverage the collaborative approach to changing the use of premises to realise success in other areas?*

*What additional support can we give to staff to prepare for different working arrangements in the future, including how staff work in their own home?*

## Second Wave - Successes

63. Continued access to and use of Brigade Sites as required: With clear instruction and continual following of Covid-safe guidelines, all workplaces were able to remain available to the staff who needed to be on-site.

64. Wider LFB Estate Transformation plan continued to progress: Rotas, hybrid-working and hub plans were reviewed to reflect the government's roadmap triggers, but delivery of the Estate Transformation Plan continued successfully within the COVID context and its associated additional challenges.

65. Station spot deep-clean process: The procedure for reporting and dealing with a potential CoVID-19 risk ensured that the safety of both staff and community was always maintained with very limited incidents where a station was taken off the run. The process of reporting and confirming cleaning appointment details/requirements was very simple and effective.

66. General enhanced Estate cleaning regime: The continued delivery of the enhanced cleaning regime across the Brigade estate played a key part in keeping staff and those in our communities safe – reducing risks of transmissions and providing reassurance to those for whom working at home has not been an option.

## Second Wave – Challenges

67. Staff Expectations - COVID: Despite the Government message of 'Work from Home if you can' remaining in place throughout the second wave, there are varying levels of expectations across staff groups. With some staff members being keen to return to the office for various reasons (isolation, cramped work conditions at home etc), and others feeling wary of commuting any time soon there has been significant pressure on Property to provide answers on next steps.
68. Staff Expectations – Union Street: With numerous changes in motion at Union Street, including the increased presence of GLA staff and the reimagining of the use of spaces across the property, staff are keen to be reassured about what this means for their future on-site work. This is far more difficult to manage remotely and can be subject to misinformation being shared.
69. Premises' transformation support: With most staff off-site, removal of both business and personal items from premises has been a far larger challenge than would have been expected during the premises' transformation.

## Second Wave – Issues

70. 'Deep clean' exposure requirements: Due to continual changes to Government guidelines and confusion around some exposure definitions, different levels of deep-cleans have had to be organised such as certain spaces or certain appliances in isolation. This has caused some confusion around the use of alternative space while cleaning takes place or different stations requesting different levels of cleaning support. Full deep cleans in this scenario have also impacted the availability of appliances and management of this has been resource intensive.
71. Remote support functions requests: Impacts of staff working remotely made it harder for support functions to respond to requests without knowing who was and was not working in the same way as they would on-site - including factoring in flexible work hours and external/environmental pressures such as home-schooling/child-care/sickness etc which impacts scheduling and prioritising.

## Second Wave – Learning

72. Extended remote working period widens the gap of individual needs: The longer staff have been required to work remotely due to the pandemic, the more inequalities in available equipment, access and space become apparent. Different options for borrowing or being allocated equipment may need to be considered in future to ensure that there is parity in all team members' ability to deliver their roles in their available environment.

## Service Delivery & Partner Support

### 73. **Position prior to COVID-19 (Recap)**

*The Brigade has a series of standard operating procedures in place with regards to service delivery. This extends to how we also work with others through collaboration, and during a major incident or business disruption. There are procedures in place that cover multiagency working (such as LESLP), pan London resilience (through the London Resilience Group) and the Strategic Response Arrangements. These also make provision for temporary structures and the provision of staffing and funding, such as the London Local Authority Coordination Centre (LLACC) etc.*

### 74. **First Wave Lessons Learnt Key Considerations (Recap)**

*What can we do to support our partners in the long term? Is it sustainable or does it risk the development of the Brigade and its future services?*

*How can we utilise the 'spirit' so very evident within the Brigade into adapting and changing our own service at speed for the better?*

## Second Wave - Successes

75. Recognition to our response so far: LFB's response to Covid-19 was recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), endorsing the continual positive impact the Brigade's response to the pandemic is having across the communities we serve.
76. Interpretation of Government updates and Covid-safe guidelines: The Brigade has consistently met the challenges of responding to changing guidelines and instructions in order to remain compliant and to be fore-armed with strategic responses to changing Covid case-rates, the introduction of the Government's Roadmap and the impacts of increased testing/subsequent rise of Self-Isolation.
77. Pan-agency London Contribution: LFB continued to work within the COVID Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) for London, providing important support to all aspects of the City's response to the pandemic – including looking ahead towards recovery activity, providing strategic guidance, and identifying support mechanisms to enhance our partners' capacity to respond.
78. Recognition of good collaborative working: LFB's response to Covid-19 was supported by ongoing collaborative engagement and consultation with the FBU and our other partners. As detailed below, this was a unique scenario due to so much change over an extended period, but all RBs and partners ultimately shared a focus on delivering good outcomes for Londoners and acted as such.
79. LAS Ambulance Driver Assistance: The ADA scheme and Operation Braidwood has continued to provide invaluable support for the LAS throughout the second wave, exceeding the initial commitments to maximise the available support. As well as the crucial assistance for our partner

agency, the ADA scheme continues to provide unique opportunities for LFB volunteers to gain experience and enhance their basic medical training, which should ultimately provide additional value to both organisations for a long time into the future.

## **Second Wave – Challenges**

80. Uncertainty and evolving Government guidance: Due to the nature of the pandemic, fluctuating evidence of case-rates, social-distancing, and lockdowns alongside expected future impact-analysis has resulted in a constantly evolving approach to Government guidance being produced. An organisation such as LFB with a wide-ranging portfolio of service deliverables and statutory duties is at risk of confusion when conflicting messages require communicating and embedding at speed.
81. LAS Ambulance Driver Assistance: As highlighted in the 'successes' above, the ADA scheme and Operation Braidwood has continued to provide invaluable support for the LAS throughout the second wave. However, while the scheme continues to exceed the initial commitments in terms of resource this naturally continued to impact the Brigade in terms of staffing levels, costs, an uplift in support needs such as the growing efforts of EPT to back-fill PAO roles and the challenges of staff fatigue due to long-term support efforts.
82. Industrial Relations & Partnership Collaboration: With continued adaptation of guidelines, responsibilities, and support requirements we had to work flexibly in introducing some policies and new ways of working, particularly in the lead-up to the Second Wave activities such as supporting testing and anticipating vaccination scenarios. The speed at which this was occurring presented challenges to the Brigade being able to consult with RBs and other partners under normal timelines due to having limited information from external sources and due to the sheer volume of new activities being introduced. While this is inevitable in such an environment of uncertainty, it should still be recognised as a challenge for all involved.
83. Data-request rationale: Partner requests (particularly NFCC & SCG) for second-wave daily reporting from LFB were made without guidance on content or rationale of use. A template was suggested by LFB and has been returned daily, but the content was estimated and the need unknown.

## **Second Wave – Issues**

84. Support impacts – Capacity: Due to high levels of Self Isolation in the second wave, operational staff faced issues related to reduced capacity and management of staffing levels. It was challenging to ensure that the volume of staff detached in partner-support roles were not ultimately putting LFB response capacities at risk. With all agreed degradation measures in place, this risk remained high and required constant monitoring.
85. Collective Governance: For some strands of work, an example being vaccination, there were unclear distinctions between the roles of different governing groups at times. The SCG/DCG and LRF should support agencies by coordinating governance arrangements and highlighting where there are overlaps causing challenge so these can be quickly resolved.
86. Data-request pace and volume: Reporting schedules were exceptionally frequent, even at the time of the second wave slowing down significantly. Requests for data and reporting were

almost always made adjacently from multiple agencies or departments without any attempt to combine and streamline processes, resulting in huge amounts of wasted resource and duplicated activity.

## **Second Wave – Learning**

87. Continue to expect the unexpected: With multiple changes to terms and regulations outlined by the Government throughout the second wave (such as daily changes to guidance around household mixing at Christmas), the introduction of the Government's Roadmap, the impacts of increased testing and anticipated vaccination roll-out, it continues to be vital that LFB maintains its own horizon-scanning tools and measures in order to provide dependable guidance and leadership as the pandemic progresses and in the case of future waves or variants being identified.
88. Support impacts - Cost: Although the need to support our partners has been continually recognised and managed, the financial impacts on the Brigade both now and as we continue to respond to the pandemic must continue to be considered when committing to further assistance schemes or partner requests.
89. Support impacts – rationale and perception: As pandemic activity slowed towards the end of the second wave, LFB's commitment to supporting the LAS ADA scheme remained at its peak volume. In the case of a further reduction of activity for LAS or considering different scenarios ahead, LFB should consider what parameters for assistance are valid as a direct response to COVID.  
  
In the case that support either begins to meet needs outside of COVID, or appears to (internally or externally) suggest the Brigade could be at risk of either appearing to have 'spare' resource or to be prioritising needs outside of its own statutory response responsibilities then support should be reviewed.
90. Industrial Relations & Partnership Collaboration tempo expectations: While it is an RB or other delivery partners role to scrutinise change and its impact on staff, on occasion this was happening too early or in strategic meetings where it became a barrier to continual development and in some cases turned out not to be relevant by the time a process or policy had been worked through. In an event such as the pandemic where guidance is ever-changeable, potential changes to normal decision-making processes or tempos may need to be considered in advance of each situation presenting itself and some exceptions made where possible to suit all parties fairly.
91. Measurable report requests: It would be beneficial to indicate the specific reporting measures required and the ongoing use at the point of requests being made to steer the most accurate and impactful reporting and data capture.



# Frontline Operational Response

## 92. **Position prior to COVID-19 (Recap)**

*The Brigade employs approximately 4,800 operational staff, most are based at one of the 102 fire stations located across London. Station based staff work as part of a four-watch rota working two twelve-hour day shifts followed by two 12-hour night shifts.*

*The daily routine of station-based staff is highly structured, and a typical day shift may be made up of the following activities:*

- *Emergency response*
- *Training such as DaMop (Development and Maintenance of Operational Professionalism) and specialist training and exercising.*
- *Community Fire Safety work such as Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs)*

*To maintain operational emergency cover, it is necessary to move staff across the Brigade to ride appliances by standby moves. The responsibility for managing standbys is undertaken by the Resource Management Centre (RMC), who will maintain a strategic overview of personnel ridership levels across the Brigade.*

## 93. **First Wave Lessons Learnt Key Considerations (Recap)**

*How do we empower local level use of stations to support communities and encourage greater self-determination in deciding what stations should be involved in beyond their core duties?*

*What have we learned about engaging with station staff and how can we maintain this into the future?*

## **Second Wave - Successes**

94. Service delivery maintenance: Despite the combined and significant challenges of COVID throughout the Second Wave of the pandemic, our Frontline response has been maintained and our communities have been served and protected throughout against all Business as Usual fire-safety needs. The successful resilience of the Brigade throughout this extended period should not be underestimated, and the examples of team-work and adaptation seen should inform lessons for years to come.

95. Continued Community support: LFB committed Mobile Shelters to support roll-out of vaccinations in densely populated areas of London where residents have limited access to transport routes, as supported by local Station Teams alongside continued support with ventures such as community foodbank deliveries and PPE distribution.

96. Service tool innovation: Online tools for Community Fire Safety, Schools and Home Fire Safety Visits have continued to be improved and increased in scale, ensuring that service levels have been maintained and providing increased reassurance of the ability to respond to uncertainty and environmental challenge in future.

97. Training adaptation: Adapted face-to-face low-level training exercises were reintroduced from March 29, the earliest date at which this was able to be reintroduced in a compliant way having adapted to Covid-safe guidelines regarding cohort size and workspace safety.

## **Second Wave – Challenges**

98. Guideline interpretation: As with all areas of the Brigade, constantly changing Government guidelines made it difficult to present fixed messages. This was particularly confusing and led to some challenges for operational staff to determine what 'close-contact' meant in terms of self-isolation requirements (e.g., whether having been on shift together, been in a vehicle together or having had a conversation).
99. Self-isolation (SI) impacts: With increased SI across the Second Wave there have been challenges managing the maintenance of staffing levels and service delivery targets. Fortunately, this has been well managed, however we have benefitted from a far lower amount of general absence or leave uptake so cannot assume that this would be maintained in a further wave or similar scenario.
100. Agreement of processes for staff in cases of COVID exposure risk: For example, in the case of a Station being subject to a post-exposure deep clean, there was occasional conflict between staff being required to remain off-site for a period, for example in a vehicle, however RBs were concerned that this was unsuitable practice due to the weather and lack of access to usual provisions.

## **Second Wave – Issues**

101. Continued Track and Trace limitations: Limitations and confusion around the ongoing NHS Track and Trace programme have impacted stations with significant numbers of staff being notified of an exposure without the ability to test and be released from SI. The need to request guidance from the BCC or Business Continuity Team has taken up significant resource and widened the inconsistencies around activity in this area.
102. The continued need to 'deep clean' stations: This has resulted in the need for crews to vacate stations for a significant period of time. This has generated additional appliance movements to maintain strategic fire cover across London.
103. Reopening of Schools - SI: Although positive that Schools were able to temporarily reopen, the impact of increased exposure to COVID and the 'Bubble SI' outcomes related to those firefighters and operational staff with school-age children in their household were significant.
104. Vaccination impacts: Information regarding vaccination programmes from early 2021 suggests that further challenges will be faced in terms of potential access to and allocation of further vaccines. This may have a further impact on operations.
105. Lack of access to Lateral Flow Test (LFT) Kits: By the end of the second wave, LFT kits were becoming readily available across London, however due to a number of seeming 'false starts' when it came to the programme being introduced to the Brigade, Station and Frontline staff who were at higher risk of transmission were not prioritised in order to ensure early distribution and engagement with NHS processes.

## Second Wave – Learning

106. LAS ADA Volunteers: Due to extended activity requirements, it is important that those undertaking ADA roles continue to provide feedback on their experiences – both positive impacts and challenges being faced. Local managers would benefit from fully understanding the roles and responsibilities being undertaken to maximise benefit when staff return to BAU.
107. Management of RBs through continued uncertainty: The unprecedented length of the pandemic so far and the significant uncertainty faced should be recognised as a scenario that could play out again in future. Impacts and risks should be continually captured at an operational level so that collaboration in a similarly fast paced but long-lasting situation can be managed when time for consultation can be limited, and information is subject to change.

## Welfare & Culture

### 108. **Position prior to COVID-19 (Recap)**

*The Brigade has recognised the importance of staff welfare and the part that culture must play on how effective it is for some time now. There have been a long-standing counselling and wellbeing service available to staff for many years now, which was called heavily upon following the Grenfell Tower fire. The Brigade has also been developing its understanding of mental health and now has a dedicated cultural change team in place. The evolution of the Inclusion Strategy into the Togetherness Strategy is another important strand of the work on welfare and enabling our people to be the best they can be.*

### 109. **First Wave Lessons Learnt Key Considerations (Recap)**

*How can we more effectively support staff who work remotely?*

*What tools and techniques are we developing to support the wellbeing of staff in this new environment?*

*How do we build on the flexibility and adaptability demonstrated by our staff during this period to support the Brigade's cultural change ambitions?*

## Second Wave - Successes

110. Adaptability to accessible tools and platform enhancements: Introducing additional access options such as Closed Caption subtitles to All Staff Briefings ensures that key Brigade information and updates are more easily shareable and able to be discussed among teams in real-time without catching up required.
111. Lunch & Learn Events: Introduction of themed weeks of talks and lunchtime learning sessions on areas such as Neurodiversity and Inclusion were successful in increasing opportunities for togetherness and discussion for those working remotely.

## Second Wave – Challenges

112. 'Whole Team' working: Extended periods of remote working meant that it became increasingly difficult to ensure that all team members' voices are heard – whether in the case of collaborative working or more social settings. Encouragement for those less likely to speak out is far more difficult remotely and new ideas around collaboration have needed to be explored.
113. Entire Brigade attendance: Although all staff are actively encouraged to join in with remote or 'virtual' events such as briefings and the themed Lunch & Learn events, this is still a relatively new medium and there is some hesitancy or reluctance to join in. Equally, there is the challenge of encouraging more diverse voices to be heard (as per above) during these question and answer sessions.

114. Reluctance to self-moderate: The virtual all staff briefings are a valuable way that all staff can access and ask questions of the senior leadership team. There are challenges here though. The option to be 'anonymous' is important in encouraging those to come forward with questions, but it has a downside in that it can also be used for passive aggressive 'trolling' of Brigade activities, policies or even staff seemingly without consequence. We need to find a way to encourage staff to self-moderate each other when a doubtful claim is made. There has been some evidence of this happening recently where opinions have been corrected by those delivering the work that is being 'challenged'. We need to enable more staff to feel empowered to do this.

## **Second Wave - Issues**

115. Extended uncertainty: As stated in the First Wave Lessons learnt Report "*The gradual return to Union Street represents an opportunity for the Brigade to instil a cultural change that empowers the workforce to work flexibly and productively*". However, since any solid timeline for this return is still unknown it is harder to reinforce these learnings in a tangible or meaningful way.

## **Second Wave – Learning**

116. 'Whole Team' approach innovation: Encouragement for those less likely to speak out is far more difficult remotely and new ideas around collaboration should continue to be explored to encourage input from staff at all levels and maximise the opportunities for the Brigade to draw from the huge variety of personalities and experiences of our staff.
117. Avoid 'Initiative Fatigue': Now that we know more about the extent of how changeable the COVID guidelines and impacts are, the Brigade needs to find the balance between looking ahead at how new working and cultural practices can be embedded while recognising that there may still be a way to go so as not to be continually amending policies and creating confusion or disengagement.
118. Enhanced welfare needs: there is a broad need for unique welfare support which is increasing and diversifying as the pandemic continues – the need to assist staff through this time should not be underestimated while such seismic uncertainty remains.

## **Report Distribution & Use**

119. The intended use of this report is to help capture our experience and lessons learnt so that it can be shared internally and with external audiences such as our partners and other interested parties, including HMICFRS and Home Office. It is also intended to help LFB departments review and update their own business continuity plans as appropriate in response to the learning captured in this report.